

A life of achievement

ONE of Lilydale's most loved sons, Thomas Mitchell, has passed away aged 85 years.

Better known as Tommy, he was born in 1903, the second son of Charlie and Blanche Mitchell.

Tommy was named after his grandfather, Thomas Blayney, pioneer wine-grower in the Goulburn Valley.

His early years were spent around Lilydale's Cave Hill in what could only have been a child's paradise. There was a farm and farmyard complete with factories for cheese, butter, ham, bacon and soap manufacture.

The limeworks were alive with scores of horses and drays constantly hauling limestone from the quarry.

With the private railway bringing firewood to fuel the kilns, Cave Hill must have been a constant source of amusement and adventure.

When Tommy turned 11, he was enrolled as a boarder at the Grange School, South Yarra, before transferring with his brother, David, to Geelong Grammar School at Corio.

A year after leaving school, an uncle bet Tommy 50 pounds he could not travel around the world on the same amount of money.

In an instant, Tommy was working his outward passage as a ship's steward.

In the two years spent travelling, Tommy spent time on each of the five continents, including a spell in the United States during the prohibition.

Unfortunately, when he returned home, Tommy's

uncle's challenge.

On returning to Melbourne he began work with a company headed by Sir John Monash, and formed as partnership between the David Mitchell Estate and Monash's own company.

This venture was later to become the Monier Concrete Co.

When the depression hit Australia, Tommy gathered together several agencies, including Passiona soft drink, and traded in Hong Kong for six months.

It was here that Tom developed his lifelong passion for Chinese food.

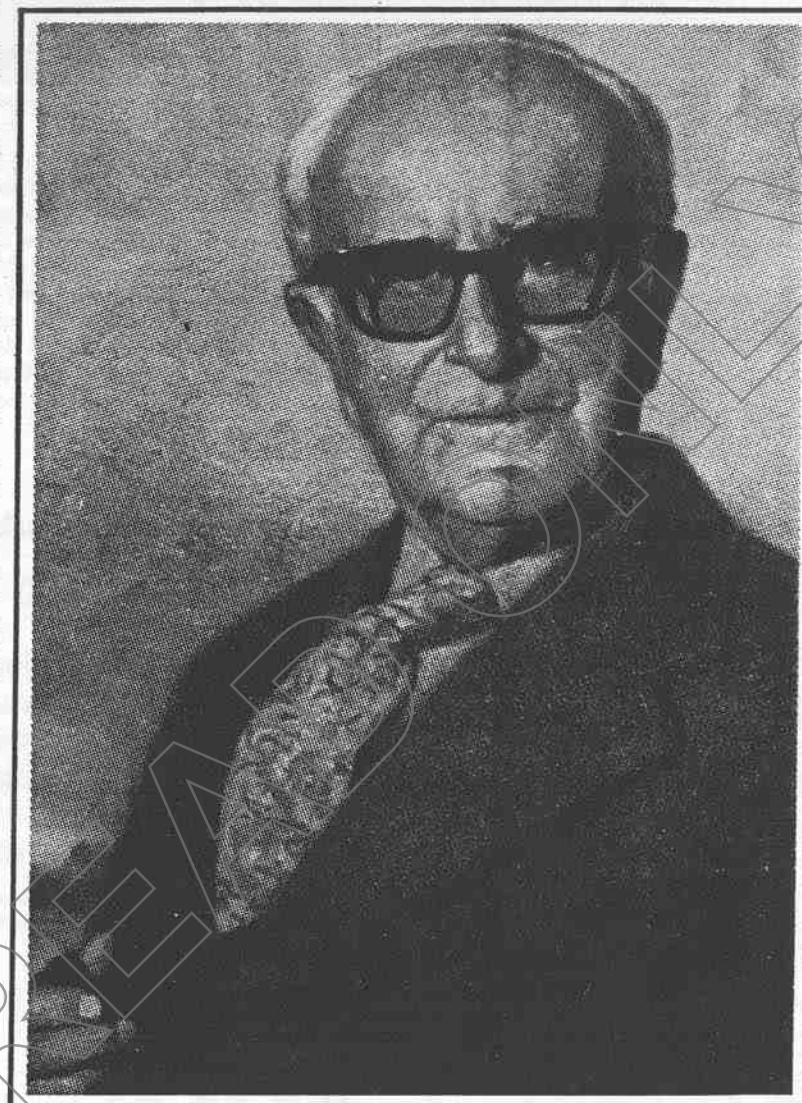
On returning to Lilydale he set up business and was elected to Lilydale Council. Tommy served as shire president for several years, and served as president of the Lilydale Football Club during two of its premier-ship years.

During the disastrous 1939 bush fires Tommy worked tirelessly and was awarded an illuminated address for his efforts.

He was actively involved in the Morning Star gold mine at Kavington, an interest which continued over four decades culminating in the re-opening of the A1 Consolidated Mine at Gaffney's Creek in the 1960's.

One day, while returning from playing golf at the Croydon Club (where he was founding secretary) Tommy's car left the road and hit a telephone pole.

While recuperating in Mount St Evans Hospital, Tommy's sister, Billie, a nurse, introduced him to another nurse, Helen Eugene



moved into a modest cottage which they named 'Doonside'.

When war was declared Tommy left his business and joined the Australian Intelligence Service and supervised the shipment of goods to Bougainville.

The couple's first child, Jenny, was born in 1941, and their second, John, in 1944.

After the war Tommy resumed business in Lilydale, taking on the agency for Harry Ferguson's new tractors.

In the 1950's he built Main Street's first large modern building.

His business flourished and for many years was the most successful Massey Harris dealership in Victoria.

After their children went to school, the couple spent extensive time exploring the world. In the following 25 years they visited most countries and all continents, but it was only on their last trip that Tommy agreed to return to America.

It seems the experience of living in prohibition conditions was clearly etched in Tommy's mind.

During their travels, the couple shunned five star hotels preferring to hunt out lodgings more representative of their host countries.

Tommy became a diligent photo-journalist and during the 1950's and 60's was eagerly sought after to give slide shows to friends, clubs, and numerous interested groups.

When the last of David Mitchell's heirs died, a board of directors was appointed to manage the estate.

Tommy was the representative for members of the Charles Mitchell branch of the family.

He remained a board member until his death and was

chairman for 12 years.

It was largely thanks to Tommy that David Mitchell Limited developed into a highly successful business with interests in five states and territories.

In 1987 Tommy and Helen left their beloved Doonside, where they had established one of Lilydale's most beautiful gardens.

Tommy became ill last Christmas. In January he was diagnosed as having advanced leukemia and given two months to live. He died on February 14.

Tommy Mitchell's life spanned 85 years. It embraced two World Wars and man's first steps on the moon. It began 16 years after Australia's first centenary and ended one year after its second.

At a memorial service at St John Anglican church in Lilydale, Tom's son John read out one of the most fitting of the countless tributes the family had received.

It read simply, 'One meets in a lifetime certain special people - your father being one'.

Thomas Mitchell is survived by his wife Helen, his children Jenny and John, and their families.

By MATT SCOTT with thanks to Tommy's son, John Mitchell.

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